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R 060915Z MAY 78 ZDK
FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1432
INFO AMCONSUL BOMBAY
AMCONSUL CALCUTTA
AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
AMEMBASSY DACCA
AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU
AMCONSUL MADRAS
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 3 NEW DELHI 7173

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, 8,
7?3:5: THE POLITICS OF CASTE IN BIHAR: THE RESERVATION ISSUE
AND BEYOND

1. SUMMARY: BIHAR, INDIA'S SECOND MOST POPULOUS STATE AND ONE OF ITS POOREST PER CAPITA, HAS LONG BEEN CHARACTERIZED BY A FEUDAL, CASTE-RIDDEN SOCIAL STRUCTURE--MORE SO PERHAPS THAN ANY OTHER STATE. TENSIONS BETWEEN THE SO-CALLED "FORWARD" (OR HIGHER) AND "BACKWARD" (OR LOWER) CASTES HAVE ALWAYS BEEN A MAJOR FACTOR IN BIHAR POLITICS AND SOCIETY BUT SEEMED TO BE DIMINISHING DURING THE LONG YEARS OF CONGRESS RULE. NOW, HOWEVER, THE JANATA GOVERNMENT IN THE STATE HAS RESURRECTED
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THESE LONG-STANDING CASTE TENSIONS BY INTRODUCING A MEASURE RESERVING 26 PERCENT OF STATE JOBS FOR MEMBERS OF THE BACKWARD CASTES. IN DOING SO, IT HAS INFLAMED OLD PASSIONS AND SPARKED A SERIES OF VIOLENT INCIDENTS WHICH HAVE WORSENED BIHAR'S ALREADY TROUBLED LAW AND ORDER SITUATION. CHIEF MINISTER THAKUR'S STRATEGY IS EVIDENTLY TO WOO THE BACKWARD CASTES TO HIS CAMP IN ORDER TO SHORE UP HIS POSITION, WHICH HAS COME UNDER INCREASING FIRE.

JANATA MAY TRY TO EXTEND THIS STRATEGY TO OTHER PARTS OF THE "HINDI BELT", BUT THERE ARE SOME DOUBTS WHETHER SUCH AN ATTEMPT TO FORGE A COALITION OF INTERMEDIATE CASTES WILL PROVE TO BE A WINNING ELECTORAL COMBINATION. MEANWHILE, MRS. GANDHI IS BUSILY AND EFFECTIVELY RECONSTRUCTING HER OWN CASTE/COMMUNITY ALLIANCE OF BRAHMINS, HARIJANS, MUSLIMS AND TRIBALS. THIS MESSAGE WAS PREPARED BY EMBASSY NEW DELHI AND CONGEN CALCUTTA OFFICERS WHO RECENTLY VISITED BIHAR. END SUMMARY.

2. BIHAR'S SOCIAL STRUCTURE TRADITIONALLY HAS BEEN DELINEATED ALONG RIGID CASTE LINES. EFFECTIVE POWER WAS IN THE HANDS OF THE FORWARDS: BHUMIHARS AND RAJPUTS WERE THE BIG LANDLORDS, BRAHMINS THE TEACHERS, PRIESTS AND SCHOLARS, AND KAYASTHAS THE CLERKS, CIVIL SERVANTS AND ADMINISTRATORS. UP UNTIL THE LATE 1960'S THESE FORWARD CASTES TENDED TO DOMINATE POLITICS AS WELL. AMONG THE BACKWARD CASTES, THE YADAVS, KURMIS, BANIAS, KOERIS AND MALIS ARE THE MOST SIGNIFICANT. THESE BACKWARDS ARE LOW ON THE SOCIAL LADDER BUT NOT NECESSARILY ON THE ECONOMIC ONE. MANY OF THEM ARE RELATIVELY PROSPEROUS LAND-OWNERS AND SHOPKEEPERS. NONETHELESS, THEY WERE LONG EXCLUDED FROM REAL POLITICAL POWER. THE SITUATION HAS BEEN GRADUALLY CHANGING OVER THE PAST DECADE. BACKWARDS HAVE BECOME ACTIVE IN POLITICS AS WELL AS IN COMMERCE. CONVERSELY, THE FORWARDS HAVE LOST THEIR COMMANDING PLACE IN THE POLITICAL ARENA BUT STILL EXERT A POWERFUL GRIP OVER THE RURAL AREAS. INDEED, DESPITE THZ CHANGES IN THE POLITICAL FIELD, RURAL SOCIETY WAS LARGELY UNTOUCHED. THERE REMAINS A KIND OF SYMBIOTIC

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RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE TRADITIONAL LANDLORDS AND THE LOCAL ADMINISTRATIVE AUTHORITIES, REPRESENTED BY REVZNUE COLLEKTORS, POLICE CONSTABLES AND SO ON. BOTH OF THESE GROUPS ARE LARGELY (THOUGH NOT EXCLUSIVELY) DRAWN FROM MEMBERS OF THE FORWARD CASTES. (ACCORDING TO ONE ESTIMATE, AS MUCH AS 90 PERCENT OF THE GRASS-ROOTS ADMINISTRATION IS STILL DRAWN FROM FORWARD CASTES.) THUS AT THE RURAL LEVEL, THE FEUDAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE ELEMENTS HAVE AN INTEREST IN PRESERVING THE STATUS QUO AND AS A RESULT MANY PROGRAMS FOR SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC ADVANCEMENT (SUCH AS DETERMINED IMPLEMENTATION OF LAND REFORMS) HAVE STAGNATED. IN ONE SENSE, THE RESERVATION POLICY IS SEEN AS AN HONEST ATTEMPT TO BREAK THIS OLD HEGEMONY OF THE FORWARD CASTES OVER THE COUNTRYSIDE.

3. THIS ISSUE: JOB RESERVATION AS A REMEDY FOR BACKWARDNESS IS NOT A NEW CONCEPT IN INDIA. IN BIHAR, 24 PERCENT OF ALL GOVT JOBS ARE RESERVED FOR SCHEDULED CASTES (HARIJANS) AND SCHEDULED TRIBES. AS FAR BACK AS THE 1950'S, VARIOUS STUDY COMMISSIONS HAVE SUGGESTED MEANS (INCLUDING THROUGH JOB RESERVATION) OF ASSISTING OTHER DEPRIVED GROUPS. THESE COMMISSIONS IDENTIFIED 128 BACKWARD CASTES AS DESERVING OF SPECIAL TREATMENT BECAUSE OF THEIR LOW SOCIAL STATUS IN TRADITIONAL BIHAR SOCIETY. THEIR RECOMMENDATIONS,

HOWEVER, LANGUISHED OVER THE YEARS. IN ITS CAMPAIGN MANIFESTO LAST YEAR, THE JANATA PARTY PLEDGED TO IMPLEMENT A JOB RESERVATION POLICY IF ELECTED. THUS, FOR THE FIRST TIME IN THE STATE'S HISTORY A SERIOUS EFFORT IS UNDERWAY TO SET UP JOB QUOTAS FOR SOCIALLY "DEPRIVED" GROUPS. THE POLICY WAS UNDER DISCUSSION IN THE CABINET OF CHIEF MINISTER KARPOORI THAKUR FOR SEVERAL MONTHS IN 1977/78 BEFORE IT WAS OFFICIALLY ANNOUNCED IN THE COURSE OF THE STATE GOVERNOR'S ANNUAL BUDGET SPEECH TO THE BIHAR ASSEMBLY ON MARCH 13. IN ESSENCE, THE POLICY WOULD RESERVE 26 PERCENT OF ALL STATE JOBS (CLERKS, ADMINISTRATORS, POLICE OFFICIALS AND TEACHERS ARE AMONG THE MOST IMPORTANT CATEGORIES) FOR MEMBERS OF THE 128 LISTED BACKWARD CASTES. FOLLOWING LARGE SCALE AGITATIONS THE POLICY WAS MODIFIED FOR JOB RESERVATION ONLY TO THOSE MEMBERS OF BACKWARD CASTES
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WHOSE MONTHLY INCOME IS LESS THAN ONE THOUSAND RUPEES.

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AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 3 NEW DELHI 7173

4. THE FALL-OUT: AGITATION AGAINST THE RESERVATION ISSUE WAS UNDER WAY EVEN BEFORE THE OFFICIAL ANNOUNCEMENT. AS REPORTED IN NEW DELHI 4173, FORWARD CASTE STUDENTS DISRUPTED J.P. NARAYAN'S MARCH 12 PUBLIC MEETING ON THE PATNA MAIDAN. SINCE THEN, BIHAR HAS BEEN WRACKED WITH DEMONSTRATIONS AND WORSE AS ELEMENTS FROM THE FORWARD CASTES HAVE AGITATED AGAINST THE RESERVATION POLICY. STUDENTS HAVE BEEN ESPECIALLY ACTIVE. MANY OF THESE MAY BE ACTING ON BEHALF OF POLITICAL ELEMENTS, BUT IS ALSO TRUE THAT STUDENTS FROM FORWARD CASTE FAMILIES FEAR THEY WILL BE DISADVANTAGED IN JOB OPPORTUNITIES IF THE POLICY GOES THROUGH. IN RECENT WEEKS THERE HAS BEEN A RASH OF BOMBINGS ON UNIVERSITY CAMPUSES, AND THE GENERAL TURMOIL HAS FORCED MOST UNIVERSITIES TO REMAIN CLOSED. THEY ARE LIKELY TO REMAIN SO UNTIL

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THE BEGINNING OF THE NEXT SEMESTER. IN ADDITION, ACTS OF SABOTAGE HAVE BEEN CARRIED OUT AGAINST RAILWAY AND COMMUNICATION FACILITIES IN THE STATE. OVER 100 PERSONS (INCLUDING 30 POLICEMEN) WERE INJURED AT A MASSIVE ANTI-RESERVATION DEMONSTRATION IN PATNA ON MARCH 31.

5. THE FORWARD CASTES ARE VEHEMENTLY OPPOSED TO THE RESERVATION POLICY. THEY POINT OUT THAT THERE IS ALREADY 24 PERCENT RESERVATION FOR HARIJANS AND TRIBALS AND THAT THE RESERVATION OF ANOTHER 26 PERCENT OF STATE JOBS WOULD SEVERELY RESTRICT THEIR CHANCES OF SECURING JOBS. THEIR MAJOR ARGUMENT, HOWEVER, IS THAT MANY BACKWARD CASTE MEMBERS ARE ECONOMICALLY WELL OFF AND ON THE OTHER HAND THAT MANY FORWARDS ARE POOR IN ECONOMIC TERMS. (THERE IS, FOR EXAMPLE, THE ALLEGATION THAT MANY WEALTHY HARIJANS EMPLOY BRAHMINS AS THEIR COOKS.) THE FORWARD CASTES ARGUE THAT THE CRITERION FOR DECIDING BACKWARDNESS SHOULD BE ECONOMIC, RATHER THAN SOCIAL, CONDITION AND DEMAND THAT RESERVATION BE FOR THE ECONOMICALLY BACKWARD, IRRESPECTIVE OF CASTE. THUS, EVEN MEMBERS OF FORWARD CASTES SHOULD BE ELIGIBLE FOR RESERVED JOBS IF THEY MEET THE CRITERION OF ECONOMIC BACKWARDNESS. ON THE OTHER HAND, THE BACKWARD CASTES SUPPORT THE POLICY ON THE GROUNDS THAT THEY HAVE BEEN DOMINATED BY THE FORWARD CASTES FOR CENTURIES. IN ADDITION, THEY CLAIM THAT THE FORWARDS HAVE TRADITIONALLY MONOPOLIZED THE LEVERS OF ADMINISTRATIVE POWER AND IF THE FEUDAL NEXUS AT THE RURAL LEVEL IS TO BE BROKEN, MORE STATE JOBS SHOULD GO TO THE BACKWARD CASTES.

6. THERE IS SOME BELIEF THAT JOB RESERVATION IS A "NON-ISSUE" CRITICS POINT OUT THAT ONLY 3000 TO 5000 STATE JOBS COME VACANT EVERY YEAR THROUGH DEATHS AND RETIREMENTS. HENCE, THE ACTUAL NUMBER OF POSITIONS SUBJECT TO RESERVATION WOULD BE RELATIVELY MINOR COMPARED TO BIHAR'S 60 MILLION PLUS POPULATION. NONETHELESS,

IT IS AN ISSUE FOR STUDENTS FROM FORWARD CASTES ABOUT TO ENTER
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THE JOB MARKET AND THESE ARE THE ELEMENTS IN THE FOREFRONT
OF THE AGITATIONS. IN ADDITION, THE MERE RESURRECTION OF THE
CASTE ISSUE AFTER YEARS OF RELATIVELY DORMANCY IS ENOUGH TO INFLAME
PASSIONS AND DELINEATE HARD AND FAST BATTLE LINES IN A STATE
LIKE BIHAR. (IT IS INTERESTING TO NOTE THAT OTHER, MORE "PRO-
GRESSIVE" STATES INTRODUCED RESERVATION FOR BACKWARDS YEARS AGO
WITHOUT AROUSING SERIOUS TENSIONS.)

8. WHY NOW?: CHIEF MINISTER KARPOORI THAKUR IS GENERALLY
REGARDED AS AN HONEST MAN OF INTEGRITY WHO SINCERELY BELIEVES
IN IMPROVING THE LOT OF THE "WEAKER SECTIONS". HE IE FROM THE
BACKWARD HAJAM (BARBER) CASTE HIMSELF. STILL, HIS MOTIVATIONS
IN INTRODUCING THE POLICY NOW ARE SUSPECT IN MANY CIRCLES.
THERE IS A GENERAL FEELING IN BIHAR, WHICH WE SHARE, THAT THAKUR
BELIEVES HIS BASE OF SUPPORT IN THE JANATA IS WEAK AND THAT
HE IS PURSUING THE RESERVATION POLICY AS PART OF AN EFFORT TO
BROADEN AND SECURE HIS BASE AMONG ALL BACKWARD CASTES IN THE
STATE. (BACKWARDS MAKE UP ABOUT 38 PERCENT OF THE POPULATION.)
MORE THAN THIS, HOWEVER, MANY OBSERVERS SEE THE HAND OF THAKUR'S
PATRON, GOI HOME MINISTER CHARAN SINGH, BEHIND THE RESERVATION
POLICY. ACCORDING TO THIS SPECULATION, CHARAN SINGH WANTS TO
EXPAND HIS BASE BEYOND THE JAT STRONGHOLDS OF HARYANA AND WESTERN
U.P. TO ACCOMPLISH THIS, HE MAY-- THROUGH KARPOORI THAKUR--
BE TRYING TO PROJECT HIMSELF AS THE LEADER AND DEFENDER OF ALL
BACKWARD CASTES IN NORTHERN INDIA BY ESPOUSING THEIR CAUSE
IN BIHAR AND ELSEWHERE.

8. WHATEVER THE POLITICAL MOTIVATIONS, IT IS CLEAR THAT THE
RESERVATION ISSUE CUTS ACROSS ALL PARTY LINES. THAKUR HAS DIVIDED
BOTH THE CONSTITUENT ELEMENTS OF THE JANATA AS WELL AS THE
OPPOSITION HORIZONTALLY ALONG CASTE LINES, PLACING HIMSELF IN THE
ROLE OF THE CHAMPION OF THE DOWNTRODDEN BACKWARDS. EVEN THE
USUALLY COHESIVE JANA SANGHIS ARE DIVIDED, SINCE THEY DERIVE
STRENGTH MAINLY FROM BRAHIMINS (FORWARDS) AND BANIAS (BACKWARDS).
THE DIVISIONS WHICH EXIST IN THE JANATA IN BIHAR TODAY ARE NOT
ALONG PREVIOUS PARTY LINES, BUT ALONG CASTE LINES. THAKUR
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HAS IMMOBILIZED OPPOSITION TO HIM IN THE PARTY ALONG THE PATTERN
OF CONSTITUENT PARTY LINES WHICH CHARACTERIZES THE REBELLIONS
BREWING IN OTHER JANATA-RULED STATES. THE RESERVATION
ISSUE HAS ALSO IMMOBILIZED OPPOSITION POLITICAL PARTIES,
WHICH ARE MAINLY LED BY FORWARD CASTE ELEMENTS. EVEN THE CONGRESS

(I), WHICH EFFECTIVELY IS THE "REAL" CONGRESS IN BIHAR THESE DAYS, HAS ADOPTED AN AMBIVALENT ATTITUDE AND IS UNABLE TO ATTACK THAKUR ON THIS ISSUE. BOTH MRS. GANDHI AND HER LIEUTENANT IN THE STATE, KEDAR PANDE, ARE BRAHMINS. HENCE, THEY ARE NOT IN A FAVORABLE POSITION TO EXPLOIT THE ISSUE WITHOUT RISKING SEVERE DISRUPTIONS WITHIN CONGRESS (I) RANKS, WHICH INCLUDE SIGNIFICANT BACKWARD ELEMENTS. THE CPI AND CPM, ALSO LED BY FORWARD CASTE ELEMENTS, ARE SIMILARLY DIVIDED ON THE ISSUE.

9. IS THERE A WAY OUT?: THE RESERVATION POLICY HAS STIRRED UP A HORNET'S NEST OF PROTEST WHICH THE CHIEF

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MINISTER MAY NOT HAVE ANTICIPATED. HIS GOVT'S EFFORT AT BACK-TRACKING BY SETTING A RS 1000 CEILING ON THOSE ELIGIBLE FOR RESERVATION HAS NOT MOLLIFIED THE UPPER CASTE CRITICS, WHO DEMAND THE TOTAL WITHDRAWAL OF THE UBZBME. SUCH A STEP, HOWEVER, WOULD ONLY INCITE THE BACKWARD CASTES TO RISE IN PROTEST, CLAIMING THAT THE JANATA HAD GONE BACK ON ITS WORD TO ASSIST THEM. THAKUR AND THE NATIONAL JANATA LEADERSHIP (WHICH APPROVED THE POLICY IN PRINCIPLE) ARE IN THIS SENSE FACING A NO-WIN SITUATION. EVEN J.P. NARAYAN'S EFFORT AT RECONCILIATION EARNED HIM THE SCORN

OF CRITICS ON TH
KGROUND THAT HIS FAVORING OF ECONOMIC RATHER
THAN CASTE CRITERIA FOR BACKWARDNESS WAS A PARTISAN POSITION.
THE JANATA HIGH COMMAND HAS APPOINTED A 27-MEMBER PANEL HEADED BY
LAW MINISTER SHANTI BHUSHAN TO STUDY THE QUESTION IN DEPTH. ONE
POSSIBLE WAY OF DEFUSING THE ISSUE MAY BE TO RELEGATE THE WHOLE
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QUESTION TO THE BACK BURNER DURING A PROLONGED EXAMINATION BY
THIS COMMITTEE. YET, THUS FAR, PASSIONS HAVE NOT COOLED.

10. A DANGEROUS TREND: THE BIHAR JANATA GOVT'S OPEN PATRONIZING
OF A PARTICULAR GROUP OF CASTES MAY HAVE OMINOUS PORTENTS FOR
THE FUTURE. CASTEISM IS INCREASING AS AN IMPORTANT FACTOR IN
INDIAN POLITICS. THE ATTEMPT BY THE JANATA IN BIHAR (AND ELSE-
WHERE IN THE GANGETIC BASIN) TO WIN SHORT-TERM POLITICAL GAINS
BY EXPLOITING THE CASTE ISSUE COULD VERY WELL BE AT THE EXPENSE
OF LONGER TERM INTERESTS FOR THE PARTY. CHIEF MINISTER THAKUR,
LIKE OTHER JANATA CHIEF MINISTERS IN THE NORTH, HAD BEEN SUBJECTED
TO INCREASING CRITICISM WITHIN HIS OWN RANKS AND PROBABLY BELIEVED
THAT HIS POSITION WAS THREATENED BY DISSIDENTS. ONE OF THE
ATTRACTIVE ASPECTS OF THE RESERVATION ISSUE FOR HIM HAS BEEN THAT
EMBRACING THIS POLICY WOULD STYMIE HIS OPPONENTS AND FOR THE
MOMENT SHORE UP HIS POSITION AS CHIEF MINISTER. THUS FAR, HE
SEEMS TO HAVE SUCCEEDED IN THIS STRATEGY. HOWEVER, IN THE LONGER
TERM, THIS TACTIC OF OPENLY EMBRACING THE INTER-MEDIATE CASTES
MAY BE THAKUR'S (AND THE JANATA'S) DISADVANTAGE. TO BEGIN
WITH, IS A UNITY OF BACKWARD CASTES A VIABLE POLITICAL COALI-
TION? ASIDE FROM THEIR BACKWARDNESS, THEY APPEAR TO HAVE LITTLE
IN COMMON. THERE ARE CONSIDERABLE DIFFERENCES IN ECONOMIC
STATUS AMONG THE BACKWARDS WHICH COULD EASILY LEAD TO TENSIONS
AND CONFLICTS. IN ADDITION, THERE ARE MANY OLD RIVALRIES AMONG
THEM--SUCH AS BETWEEN THE JATS AND THE YADAVS--WHICH REAPPEAR
FROM TIME TO TIME. FOR EXAMPLE, THERE IS EVIDENCE TO SUGGEST
THAT THE RIOT AT PANTNAGAR IN U.P. (SEE NEW DELHI 5855)
WAS ESSENTIALLY A JAT/YADAV SHOWDOWN. A SECOND MAJOR
QUESTION CONCERNING THE WISDOM OF SUCH A COALITION IS WHETHER IT
COULD BE A WINNING COMBINATION IN ELECTORAL TERMS. BACKWARD
CASTES MAKE UP A SIGNIFICANT PROPORTION OF THE POPULATION IN MANY
DISTRICTS IN NORTHERN INDIA (PARTICULARLY IN BIHAR) BUT NOT
IN ALL OF THEM. AN ELECTORAL STRATEGY FOUNDED ON THE BACKWARD
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CASTES MAY SIMPLY NOT PRODUCE ENOUGH VOTES TO ENSURE SOLID VIC-
TORIES ACROSS THE HINDI HEARTLAND, WHERE DIFFERENCES AMONG
CASTES ARE MORE PRONOUNCED. IN THIS CONTEXT, THE OUTCOME OF THE

VITAL AZAMGARH LOK SABHA BY-ELECTION IN U.P. (NEW DELHI 7158)
WILL BE CLOSELY WATCHED AS A TEST CASE OF THIS STRATEGY.

11. PLAYING CASTE POLITICS IS A DANGEROUS ENTERPRISE. MRS. GANDHI KNOWS THIS AND MAY SUCCEED IN BEATING THE JANATA POLITICIANS AT THEIR OWN GAME. ALTHOUGH SHE HAS ALWAYS MANAGED TO PROJECT A PUBLIC IMAGE OF BEING ABOVE CASTE AND COMMUNITY, THE FORMER PM IN FACT IS A PAST MISTRESS OF CASTE POLITICS. SHE LONG SUCCEEDED IN FORGING A WINNING COMBINATION OF BRAHMS ON THE ONE HAND AND THE "DOWNTRODDEN" ON THE OTHER: HARIJANS, TRIBALS AND MUSLIMS. THIS ALLIANCE WAS THE BEDROCK FOUNDATION ON WHICH BROADER CONGRESS MAJORITIES TRADITIONALLY RESTED. DURING THE PAST YEAR, MRS. GANDHI HAS BEEN BUSILY AND EFFECTIVELY RECONSTRUCTING THIS OLD CASTE/COMMUNITY ALLIANCE. HARIJANS AND MUSLIMS CLEARLY ARE RETURNING TO INDIRA'S FOLD, AND SHE PROBABLY NEVER DID LOSE HER BASE AMONG THE BRAHMS. IN LIGHT OF THE RESERVATION ISSUE IN BIHAR, THE KEY QUESTION NOW IS WHETHER SHE WILL BE ABLE TO ATTRACT THE OTHER FORWARD CASTES WHO ARE ANGERED AT THAKUR'S ACTIONS. IF SHE CAN DO SO IN BIHAR AND ELSEWHERE IN THE NORTHERN STATES WHERE CASTEISM IS INCREASINGLY IMPORTANT AND JANATA IS WOOING THE BACKWARDS, MRS. GANDHI-- AND NOT THE JANATA-- MAY HAVE THE WINNING COMBINATION IN THE NEXT ELECTIONS.

12. THE IMMEDIATE PROBLEM WHICH THE JANATA AND BIHAR FACE IS THAT ITS JOB RESERVATION POLICY HAS AROUSED ALL THE OLD CASTE HATREDS. FEUDAL HIGH CASTE ELEMENTS MAY HAVE LOST THEIR POLITICAL CLOUT IN THE 1960'S, BUT THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH LOCAL BUREAUCRACIES TO PRESERVE THE STATUS QUO IN RURAL AREAS REMAINS AND CANNOT BE BROKEN OVERNIGHT. THE PROBLEM IS THAT EXPECTATIONS AND PASSIONS HAVE BEEN AROUSED TO THE POINT WHERE NEITHER SIDE MAY BE ABLE TO BACK DOWN. IN ADDITION, THERE COULD BE A SIGNIFICANT SPILL-OVER EFFECT IN ADJOINING STATES OF THE "HINDI BELT".

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13. MEANWHILE, THE PREOCCUPATION WITH THE RESERVATION ISSUE AND THE ATTEMPTS TO COPE WITH THE VIOLENCE AND PASSIONS IT HAS AROUSED HAVE PRODUCED BUREAUCRATIC STAGNATION IN THE STATE ADMINISTRATION. THE GENERAL VIEW IN BIHAR IS THAT THE LAW AND ORDER SITUATION HAS NOT IN REALITY DETERIORATED SIGNIFICANTLY FROM WHAT IT WAS IN PAST YEARS. INDEED, MUCH OF THE CURRENT SCARE ABOUT VIOLENCE IN THE STATE MAY BE DUE TO OVERLY SENSATIONALISTS REPORTING IN THE PRESS. JOURNALISTS CONCEDE THAT THE CURRENT TREND IN REPORTING IS TO GIVE PROMINENCE TO ACTS OF VIOLENCE AND TO IDENTIFY CASTES INVOLVED IN THESE INCIDENTS BY NAME. AT THE SAME TIME, HOWEVER, THE FACT THAT MUCH OF THE TURMOIL AND LAWLESSNESS IS DIRECTLY RELATED TO THE JOB RESERVATION POLICY IS A MATTER OF SOME CONCERN SINCE IT TURNS ON THE KEY QUESTION OF CASTE RIVALRIES. VIOLENCE ALONG CASTE LINES IS A FAR MORE UGLY AND DANGEROUS PORTENT THAN IF IT WERE STRICTLY ALONG OTHER LINES

SUCH AS LABOR OR STUDENT UNREST. THE RESERVATION ISSUE HAS PRE-
EMPTED THE NERGIES OF THE POLITICAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE LEADERSHIP
AND DIVERTED ATTENTION FROM BIHAR'S REAL AND CHRONIC PROBLEMS.
LITTLE OR NOTHING IS BEING DONE IN THE STATE TO TACKLE THESE.
CHIEF MINISTER THAKUR MAY BE REGARDED AS A MAN OF SOME
INTEGRITY, BUT HE HAS UNLEASHED A FIRESTORM OF HATREDS WHICH
NEITHER HE NOR THE CENTRAL JANATA LEADERSHIP MAY BE ABLE TO
CONTROL
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